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Alma Mater
March 9th

Essay on Dysentery

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Dysentery is a disease in which the patient has frequent stools, accompanied with much griping, and followed by tenesmus; the stools are usually small in quantity, chiefly mucus, and this sometimes mixed with blood; the natural faces seldom appear and when they do, it is in a compact, hardened form called scybala. It occurs most frequently in summer and autumn, at the same time with bilious intermittent and remittent fevers, with which it is sometimes complicated. It makes its attack with cold shivering and other symptoms of fever, though Cullen says the topical affection of the bowels in a majority of cases precedes this. There is at the commencement of the disease severe griping, frequent inclination to go to stool, and little voided: the stools become gradually more frequent and the griping much increased; loss of appetite, nausea and much gastric distress are soon added to these symptoms; the stools are much diversified in the course of the diseased, being in some instances so entirely composed of a mucous matter, as to obtain the name of morbus mucosus, or dysenteria alba. It is however most usual for blood to be mixed with it in greater or less quantity; pure blood is occasionally evacuated to a considerable amount; the evacuation of the natural faces is said always to afford considerable relief to the patient.

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In this manner the disease runs on for a longer or shorter duration according to the nature of the fever and violence of the attack. There is a case of dysentery in which there is no discharge from the bowels, and this is said to be the most formidable shape of the disease, the inflammatory action being in so high a degree as to surpass the secretory grade. Cullen and most of the authors who have written on this disease have considered contagion as one of the causes of it: this opinion is however entirely erroneous, it being now ascertained to be contagious only when the fever is originally typhous, or has become so in the course of the disease. It may more commonly be traced to the causes of autumnal bilious fevers, as marsh effluvia, and irregularities in diet: it is sometimes epidemick, seeming to depend on some fault of the atmosphere; cold alternating with heat and moisture may act as causes of the complaint. It sometimes accompanies catarrh, and in some cases alternates with rheumatism. Sydenham says it is a febrile disease turned in upon the bowels. It is in the first instance a gastric disease, the stomach being the point attacked, from which it extends to the alimentary canal, and more especially the large intestines. The pathology of the

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diseas is inflamation of their lining membrane, and dissections shew this throughout their whole track, spreading in some cases even into the stomach; sometimes they are found of a very dark colour almost approaching the gangrenous condition; their coats are oftenx their coats thickned and in different parts tender as if nearly putrid. The large intestines are said to be more frequently affected with gangrene and ulceration than the small; constrictions are also found in the former, in some cases of considerable extent, and have even by some been supposed to be the immediate cause of the disease by retaining the natural faces, which in this manner becoming indurated occasion the irritation, and mucous bloody discharges always present in this complaint. A great degree of tenesmus, severe griping, frequent inclination to go to stool, and little being voided, much prostration of strength, very offensive evacuations, a tense and painful abdomen, cold clammy sweats, cold extremities, afthæ, hiccup, and a weak irregular pulse are unfavorable symptoms; and the reverse of these, as moderate diaphoresis, slight fever, stools not very

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frequent, and of a natural consistence, with a gradual diminution of the griping and tenesmus, are signs of returning health — The indications of cure in this disease are, to subdue inflamation, irritation, and spasm usually attending it; to procure a free discharge of the contents of the bowels, and restore the healthy action of the skin. It has been usual to commence the treatment by giving an emetic, and this practice is approved and followed by somevery respectable practitioners of the present day, with the intention of relieving the spasm of the intestines, and as a begining attempt at restoring the action of the surface. as both these indications however can be much better answered by the means which are comonly employed for the cure of the disease, their employement is rendered unecessary except in the cases where the stomach is distressed by the presence of bile, or other acrid matters exciting nausea, and which are most frequently met with in miasmatic districts combined with intermittent. Bloodletting is certainly the most important and decidly beneficial remedy we have in the management of this disease, and

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its best effects will be obtained by preceeding all our other remedies with it; early employed, it checks the progress of inflamation, and awakens susceptibility to the operation of remedies; it overcomes the spasmodic constriction of the intestines generally so powerfull an obstacle to the operation of purgatives; its effects on the skin are equally advantageous, changing a hot and dry surface to one moist and relaxed: it should be copious, to the amount of twenty or thirty ounces and this must be repeated if no impression seems to have been made on the disease by the first venesection. there seems to have been a very general coincidence of opinion among the earlier writers on this disease as to the dangerous consequences to be apprehended from the free employment of the lancet in it; whatever reason there may be for such caution in European practice, in this country it is usually a most decided and well marked case of inflamatory action to a high degree, and is without doubt best managed by bleeding to the amount above mentioned, and strict application of the whole antiphlogistic plan; the only exception to this ~~rule~~ practice, is the case in which it occurs among the poorer classes.

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of society, or in crowded places putting on typhous symptoms from its commencement. After bleeding, we may proceed to the second indication of cure, the procuring a free evacuation of the bowels, and for this purpose the castor oil, Glauber's or Epsom salts are usually selected: ~~are~~ the combination of tartarised antimony and Glauber's salts is found to produce very beneficial effects, ~~its effects~~ being a free and copious evacuation of the alimentary canal: if these medicines fail in moving the bowels, we must resort to some of the more active purgatives, and of these, calomel & jalap, or this last & cremor tartar, or a solution of salts and senna will be fully sufficient: the mercurial purges with opium are however much preferable to all others, being well suited to overcome spasm of the intestines by which their contents are retained. Cullen insists upon the necessity of steady purging in this disease; and lays it down as the leading & most important point to be kept in view in the plan of treatment. although we cannot admit this altogether, yet it is now ascertained to be correct practice to purge until the natural stools are made to appear. As the frequent

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discharges are the effect of nervous irritation, we may much earlier resort to the use of opium than is recommended by authors. Cullen and Sydenham are both opposed to this early employement of it from an idea of the disease being caused by the vitiated and unnatural contents of the bowels, and therefore suppose that opium would only serve to aggravate and continue the symptoms by preventing their evacuation. At the same time we relieve irritation we should endeavour to restore the healthy action of the skin, and this end will be attained by sweating after the necessary reduction of the inflamatory symptoms by bleeding and purging. This is certainly a most important part of the treatment of this disease; Athenside was decided in his preference of this to all other modes of managing the it, and Richter who considered it a catarrhal or Rheumatic affection of the large intestines, and the discharges as merely an accessary circumstance is equaly as favorably disposed to the sweating plan. Mosely a West India writer who entertains similar veiws of the pathology of dysentery is likewise an advocate for the same practice. The Dovers powder aided by the vapour

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bath and warm drinks will be found perhaps more completely to produce the diaphoretic effect than any other means we are possessed of. The antimonials which have been employed under the same circumstances, and for the same purpose, and highly recommended by Pringle and Baker are however much inferior to Ipecacuanha; whose credit has been long established in dysentery; it was originally given in small doses so as to make it act on the bowels chiefly: it is thought to be peculiarly well adapted to that form of the complaint in which there is a profuse discharge of blood from the bowels, but it is more especially serviceable in those cases where the pain is great and the desire to go to stool constant and without producing any evacuation; it is useful in every stage. the injection of a decoction of the bruised repeated three or four times in the twenty four hours has been said to be very serviceable, but is now known to be possessed of very little power; much more confidence it is supposed may be placed in the mode of using the Ipecacuanha recommended and practiced by Playfair; he directs it in doses of ½ to 1 dram combined with from thirty to sixty drops of laudanum

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confining the patient for some hours afterwards to a horizontal posture; if the first dose be rejected it is to be repeated. This practice which is said to be very efficacious is limited to the very first stages of the complaint, as afterwards the stomach becomes so irritable as to reject the medicine at once. The combination of the Ipecac with calomel and opium is now generally preferred to all other modes of giving it, and in this way we will perhaps most frequently succeed in obtaining its advantageous operation; with opium alone it will prove diaphoretic, and allay irritation, and if at the same time if we wish to keep the bowels gently open, the addition of calomel will answer the double indication extremely well. Blisters are very important remedies in dysentery, operating advantageously by checking the inflammation and relaxing the spasm of the intestines; they should be applied to the abdomen in preference to the extremities, as they will certainly produce better effects the nearer they are to the seat of the disease. Their employement is particularly indicated when the pain continues obstinate and the abdomen is hard and sore to the touch; they will generally be found to assist the operation

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of purgative medicines very materially; they should always be preceded by fomentations, either simple or with the addition of some stimulating articles. as cayenne pepper, or mustard. The warm bath is very useful in severe and protracted cases of this disease, and its effects will probably be most advantageous in the more advanced stages. These are the remedies which will in most instances prove efficacious in removing the inflamatory symptoms of dysentery, but there are some local affections which must be managed by their appropriate remedies. The most important of these are tormina and tenesmus, sometimes existing throughout the whole course of the complaint, but most always in the latter stages the source the of severe suffering and distress to the patient. They are generally relieved by anodyne injections, suppository of opium three or four grains: but melted butter, fresh, ~~and~~ without salt in the quantity of from one half to one pint is better. a strong solution of the muriate of soda is recommended for these symptoms and is represented to have been used with very material benefit to the patient, pain and

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tenesmus are relieved by it and the bowels are gently opened. If we should have any reason to suppose these symptoms are caused by a retention of the vitiated contents of the intestines the castor-oil and laudanum combined in the form of the oleagenous mixture may be very advantageously given. its effects being in most instances to afford very certain and speedy relief. the cretaceous julep may be also employed under the same circumstances and generally with a similar result. The Ipecac and opium will also be serviceable here. Dysentery is sometimes combined with intermittent or remittent fever. this shape of it is most frequently met with in miasmatic districts of country, it is also spoken of by Cleghorn as occurring in the island of Minorca. Under these circumstances of the disease, it has been recommended both by him and Morton to give the Peruvian bark during the intermission of the fever, while we at the same time continue the treatment for the bowel disease. this practice is very improper and will be attended with many disadvantages as this medicine is particularly unsuitable to an irritable state

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e to increase it perhaps to a very considerable degree.
The proper plan will be to disregard the intermittent fever
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suitable to it. In crowded places as Jails and ships
under other circumstances favorable to the
production of such a form of its ~~[illegible]~~, dysentery
occasionally typhus in its commencement or
becomes so in its progress, and we are here directed
to give emetics as in the primary attack of this fever
followed by moderate purging, after this we must resort to
the use of Dovers powder, opium, volatile alkali and wine
where a mercurial salivation will be attended with very
advantageous effects in this case, and is the remedy on which
we may place considerable reliance, it should be early induced
this disease sometimes runs on to the chronic stage in which
though the acute symptoms are removed, there still remains
considerable tenderness of the bowels, griping, frequent stools and
loss of appetite, with a dry parched skin and sallow complexion
emitting tonics and astringents we will here succeed best with Dovers powder and calomel

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